Cleveland's Alliance of Bosses and Workers

Industrial Association Gets Employers and Employes Together for Constructive Thinking and Harmonious Action

CLEVELAND is pioneer in a movement to improve the relations between employer and employe which approaches an old and vexing problem from an entirely new angle. The "Industrial Association of Cleveland," as the organization is called, grew out of a recognition of the fact that many of the differences between capital and labor are *mental* differences, not merely conflicts of economic interest.

An eminent sociologist once said: "If all the universities and all the pulpits and all the schools should unite on one idea which they wished the people to accept, it would not have the influence upon them that the experience of getting their living has. In the last analysis, the way we get our living shapes our characters and forms our beliefs."

Since the employer's attention is engrossed by the duties of financing his plant, managing production and marketing his product, he sees things from one viewpoint. The employe's thinking is the composite product of his mental reactions to another set of circumstances. Both the employer and the employe are reasoning on the basis of actual facts and both draw right conclusions according to the data of their experience. Yet each one only sees part of the truth—his own part—and is often unable to appreciate the thoughts, problems and viewpoint of the man on the other side of the fence. This diversity of thinking is the cause of much of the misunderstanding and friction in the industrial world.

Sherman Rogers, one of the lecturers on the program of the Industrial Association, called attention to another cause of industrial discord which is also mental. He pointed out the fact that hundreds of radical agitators, sincere and otherwise, were influencing the thinking of the workers merely because not a single voice was raised on the other side of the question. Mr. Rogers said in his lecture to the association: "In my two years' experience directly in contact with labor from Seattle to New York it has been almost impossible for me to find a single industry or a single industrial community where practically every workman has not been subjected to wild misrepresentations almost daily. I have never heard the surprisingly specious statements made by agitators contradicted by word of mouth except in one single case.

"It is true that a small part of the present wholesale propaganda does breathe violence; but nine-tenths of it does not. No law can suppress a booklet that calls capitalists merciless profiteers. No law can prohibit men from saying that capital is earning two thousand per cent. And as long as workingmen are led to believe these misleading statements, they are going to be discontented. But they will remain discontented only as long as they do not know the whole truth—and not one day longer. The only way to combat the radical agitator is through a systematic, organized campaign of truth-telling."

Basing its program on the premise that many of the differences between capital and labor are mental, the work of the Industrial Association of Cleveland is logically educational. This does not mean that the organization is devoted to propaganda. Quite the contrary is true. None of the activities can be criticized by radicals as "chloroforming the mind of the workers" because the very methods by which the work is carried on—the open discussion, the untrammelled consideration of all sides of every question that comes up—precludes the possibility of misrepresentation for the benefit of any one class.

The personal contact between bosses and workers through their mutual participation in the activities of the association is the first thing that strikes the observer. There are two classes of membership: employer memberships which are held by persons, firms and corporations, and employe memberships. Employe membership costs $5 a year while the cost of employer membership varies, depending on the number of men employed by the establishment. Each firm which supports the activities of the association is entitled to have two of its executives or owners enjoy the advantages of the organization while other persons connected with the management may join as individuals in the regular way.

The present membership of the Industrial Association is 4,500, of which 500 are employer members and 4,000 are employe members. Every type of industry is represented from the small shop to the mammoth factory. In the club rooms, you may perchance see the manager of some large corporation sitting in a conversational group which includes mostly mechanics and salesmen. This informal personal contact is a broadening factor of great significance and the man-to-man exchange of ideas and opinions is bound to produce mutual respect and toleration.

The educational activities of the association are threefold: public lectures and open forum, group meetings and classes. During the past winter, the association conducted a course of thirty lectures which attracted Cleveland's largest audiences. The speakers represented many phases of public life and human activity; national and international matters, business and industrial problems, scientific, literary and artistic subjects were presented by leaders in their respective fields.

Mr. Charles Newcomb, the executive secretary, thus describes the typical lecture: "Upon entering the lecture hall, you notice an air of good fellowship. It is not a stiff, formal crowd but an assemblage of friendly folk who seem to know one another. Eight o'clock is the hour set for getting acquainted with your neighbors and when announcement is made from the platform, every person introduces himself to the man or woman who sits on either side. Then perhaps the orchestra, a splendid orchestra, made up of members of the association, plays a selection or the association glee club sings. The speaker is introduced and the air becomes electrical. For this audience is alert, wide-awake; they greet the speaker with an attention which puts him on his mettle.

"Almost without exception the lecturers who have appeared have stated that this audience is one of the most remarkable they have ever faced. Following the lecture, an open forum is held, always an interesting feature. The questions come thick and fast, sometimes two or three people being on their feet at the same time. Any man who tries to sell these folk an idea must be prepared to defend it from every angle.

"And the next day after the lecture, it will form the theme for further discussions in a hundred shops. In several factories, the superintendent or works manager makes it a point to go out the following day to get the reaction of his foremen to the ideas suggested by the lecturer or to discuss further some of the details."

The discussion groups are an even more interesting phase of the association's work. From 12 to 20 men gather around a table to talk over problems of mutual interest. One man acts as leader. In the groups are managers, foremen, mechanics, office men, superintendents, salesmen—men representing all the gradations of industrial life. There is no set program; the question for discussion may be some principal of living, a problem of conduct or it may be an industrial, business or shop problem. Every man is entitled to his say but he had better watch his step because if he propounds some unreasonable proposition—no matter who he is—the rest of the crowd will pounce on him and show him where he is wrong. Time passes quickly and the men become so absorbed in their symposium that they almost have to be chased out of the building.

"What would you do with a workman in your shop if you caught him stealing?" was one of the questions which came up in a group meeting.

"Discharge him at once," was the answer one man immediately gave. "I'd get rid of him as soon as possible before he had a chance to do more harm," said another.

But that was not the end of the discussion. In each group there is always a man or several men who have had to deal with precisely the situation under discussion.

A superintendent said he had exactly this problem to deal with some time ago. "We had a toolmaker in our shop who was more skilled than any man in the place. We gave him a rate of pay which exceeded that received by any of our other first-class mechanics.

"The foreman reported from time to time that various things were missing and finally we caught our star mechanic with the goods. For a considerable time, he had been systematically pilfering tools and materials.

"I called him into the office and said: 'Jerry, we have the goods on you; what do you suppose I am going to do with you?'

"'Send me up, perhaps,' he replied. 'At least, you'll fire me.'

"I picked up the telephone and called up the ——— Company which is our leading competitor. The superintendent there is a friend of mine. I told him I had the best mechanic in our line I had ever known but that he was a crook. (All the time the man was listening.) I told him all the details of the man's thievery. I asked him if he wanted to give the man a chance. He said that if the man was all I said he was as a mechanic, he'd take a chance on him. I then suggested to the mechanic that he take the job. He did and, say, he's been absolutely straight ever since. That company wouldn't let him go for a lot more than they're paying him; he's been an unqualified success."

Mr. Newcomb, the executive secretary, said the interesting thing to note was that, after all sides have been heard, the group usually arrives at some general principle which is seen to govern the situation. The discussion veers back and forth; the more hard-headed ones balk at any idealistic conclusion but after they have threshed the matter out thoroughly, they always arrive at the same point. The Square Deal and the Golden Rule are finally agreed upon as the only solution and even the obstinate realists are forced almost unwillingly to the conclusion that the practical solution for the problem is an idealistic principle.

The association never passes any resolutions except those of condolence when a member dies. They do not formally resolve that a certain idea is the proper one and that another opinion is untenable and destructive. The whole aim is to present all the facts; and every man can draw his own conclusions.

The association also acts as an educational clearing house. If a man is interested in motion study, for example, and wants to take a course on the subject, the association will either find an existing course in some other Cleveland institution which the man can take or it will find other men who are interested in the same thing, form them into a class and secure a competent teacher for them.

The classes last winter covered many fields such as production engineering, effective business talking, executives' training, business administration, salesmanship, safety engineering and other technical and mechanical subjects. It is expected that during the coming winter this kind of educational work will be still more expanded.

One of the members of the association, Mr. Fred Craft, is an advertising illustrator. He has tried to express the ideals of the organization in a series of remarkable paintings which are on display in the club rooms and have been reproduced in the magazine *Co-operation*—the official organ of the association.

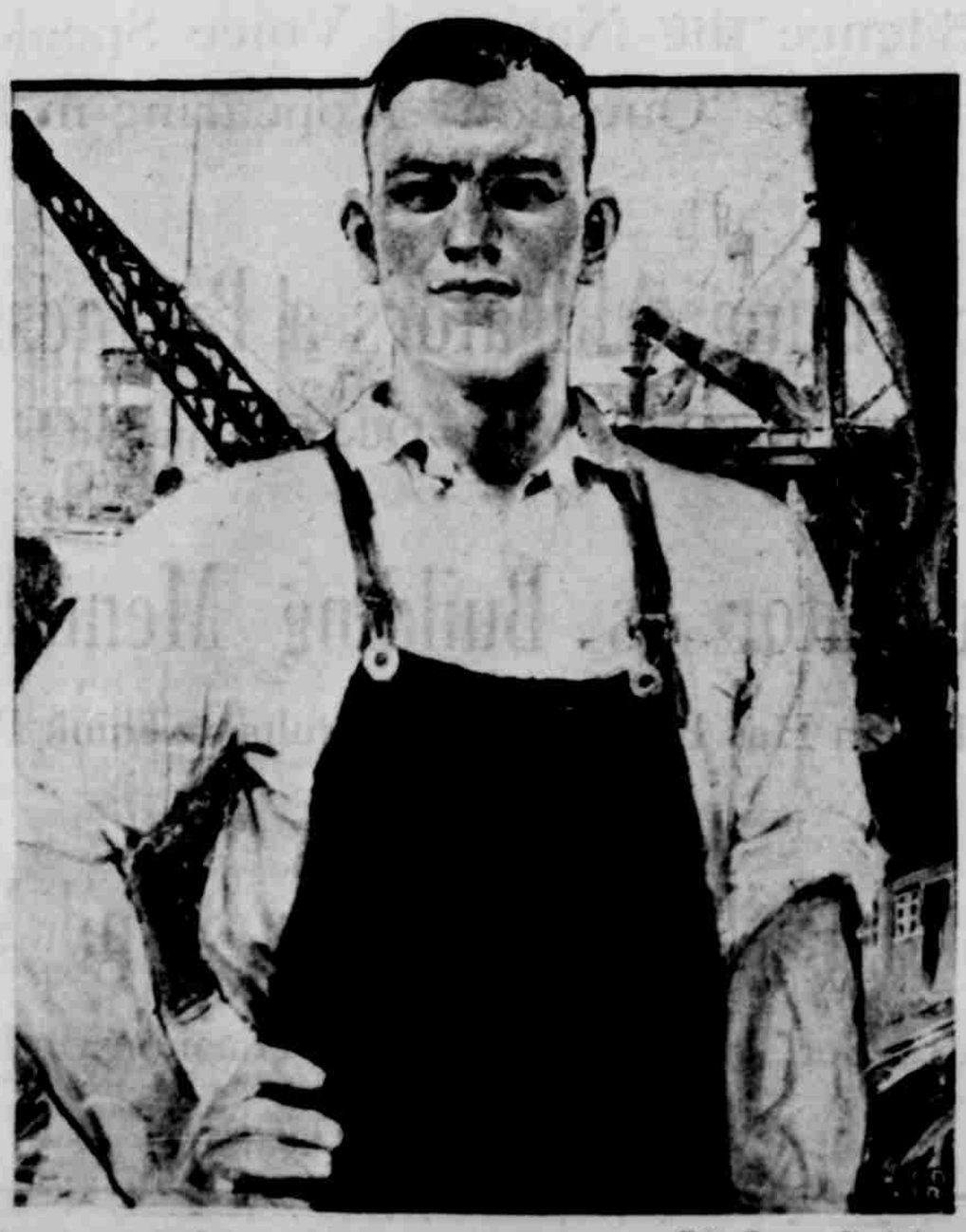
The success of the Cleveland experiment has brought many inquiries from other cities. Philadelphia has already copied the plan and leaders of public opinion in other cities are suggesting that a national organization be formed to extend the Cleveland idea to all the big cities of the country.

One manager wrote: "There is a new morale among our men that has been created through the work of the Industrial Association, which has already produced splendid results. We feel certain that our problem of production will be intelligently solved by this method of practical education."

Another firm wrote: "The manner in which our men appreciate their responsibility; the increased efficiency; the new spirit of genuine interest shown by them is beyond exaggeration."

The Man Behind the Machine

One of a series of pictures by Fred Craft, an artist connected with the Industrial Association of Cleveland. Mr. Craft sees industry not merely as a means whereby the worker may earn a living but also as a satisfying medium of self-expression, offering scope for the romantic and creative instincts.



Heiser Company, Cleveland